

Daily Reading and Reflection
Acts 2 United Methodist Church
November 23-27, 2020

Monday, November 23 – Read and reflect on Matthew 6: *“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* – Matthew 6:14

Forgiveness doesn't come naturally to us. It's easy for us to make justifications for our own behavior when we mess up, and we're often quick to point out all of the flaws in others. In his message yesterday, Pastor Brandon taught us that this is called a “fundamental attribution error.” Yet Jesus was clear in his teaching that we are forgiven to the extent that we forgive others. This is a hard truth for us to accept and practice. However, the healing we experience in the process of forgiveness allows healing to occur with others. It is a challenge to say that we accept the forgiving grace of God if we ourselves are unwilling to extend that grace to others. The nature of God's perfecting work in the world is of grace unimpeded. In our forgiveness of others, the forgiveness of Christ is completed within us.

Tuesday, November 24 – Read and reflect on Psalm 40: *“Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me.”* – Psalm 40:13

On Sunday, Pastor Brandon said, “Without forgiveness, we can never be free.” Those words take new and deeper meaning when read next to today's Scripture reading from the Psalms, when the author writes, “He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog.” In *The Message* translation, that verse reads, “He lifted me out of the ditch, pulled me from deep mud.” Our sins keep us trapped in cycles of brokenness and pain. If we think of ourselves as a turtle in a bog, our sin places us shell-side down. We need help! Forgiveness comes in the form of a passerby who turns us over and places us back on our feet. Who can you help? Where is your forgiveness needed?

Wednesday, November 25 – Read and reflect on Matthew 18: *“Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’”* – Matthew 18:21-22

One way of reading this passage can lead to thinking like, “Why would you put up with someone wronging you 77 times?” Why would any of us have that kind of tolerance? It's important to remember that forgiveness and extending grace to others is not the same as condoning their behavior or speech. God is a God of justice and compassion. Perhaps a more faithful reading of this Scripture highlights that the number of times we are to forgive others is essentially incalculable, and that forgiveness should be extended without keeping a ledger of the wrongdoing of others. Forgiveness with judgment isn't true forgiveness.

Thursday, November 26 – Read and reflect on Romans 12: *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”* – Romans 12:17-18

This chapter in Romans begins with a call for us to live our lives as living sacrifices, to allow our lives to be an act of worship. Another way of reading that passage is as a call to live lives that look like Jesus. In Jesus' death and resurrection, the sins of humankind were forgiven so that we might enter into deep and life-giving relationship with God. When we forgive others, we open ourselves up to the opportunity for life-giving relationship with others. Forgiving others allows us the chance to live peaceably with all.

Friday, November 27 – Read and reflect on Hebrews 10: *“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” – Hebrews 10:14*

God has forgiven us all. Through Jesus we have been given the chance to once again live in communion with God and be perfected by God's grace. This is oftentimes the hardest to accept for ourselves. We may extend forgiveness to others far more quickly than we extend it to ourselves. Without practicing self-forgiveness and allowing ourselves to experience God's grace, it becomes exceedingly more difficult to extend forgiveness to others. As Pastor Brandon said last Sunday, forgiveness is made possible because Jesus forgave us. “When we give and accept forgiveness,” he said, “we begin to experience life in God's Kingdom.” Extend yourself some grace and forgiveness, pray for healing and restoration, and be prepared to view yourself through God's eyes.